



The President's Daily Brief

March 9, 1976

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Exempt from general
declassification schedule of E.O. 11652
exemption category 58(1)(2)(3)
declassified only on approval of
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March 9, 1976

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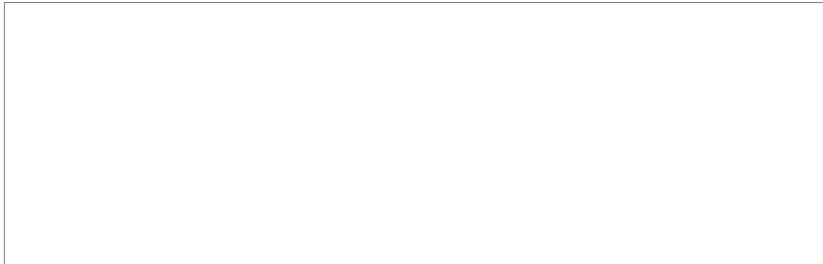
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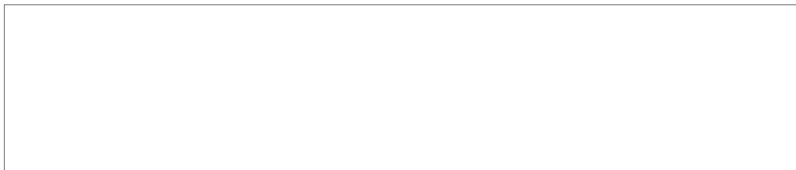
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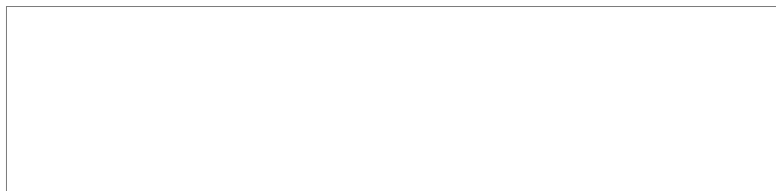
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LEBANON

A wave of cease-fire violations over the last several days by Muslim deserters from the Lebanese army has again heightened tension throughout the country. Syrian-controlled Palestinian troops have been able to contain most of the trouble, but Lebanese leaders are divided over how to deal with it.

Late last week, a robbery committed by a small group of deserters was mistakenly blamed on Christians from a small village in northern Lebanon. Muslim militiamen, reportedly aided by a few fedayeen commandos, attacked the village. The incident prompted Christian communities in Beirut to set up blockades.

The situation was relatively quiet yesterday, but Palestinian forces and Lebanese army troops had to separate Christian and Muslim militiamen.

The largest band of Muslim deserters, headed by Lieutenant Khatib, took over several abandoned military facilities yesterday. The Lebanese cabinet met yesterday to discuss the seizure, but is unlikely to provide any immediate solution.

Although Khatib has until now generally adhered to the cease-fire, his ability to roam freely throughout the eastern portion of the country has undermined Christian confidence in the truce. It has embittered both Christian and Muslim military officers, many of whom oppose the government's offer of a general amnesty to all deserters.

Khatib's espousal of political demands favoring Muslim leftists has won him support from Kamal Jumblatt and other influential leftist leaders and a growing popular following among disadvantaged Muslims. Khatib reportedly has refused amnesty from the government and has turned down a Syrian offer of political asylum. The Syrians apparently now favor inducing him and presumably other renegade officers to join fedayeen commando groups.

Damascus appears confident that it can contain the disturbances caused by the deserters and at this point seems anxious to avoid interfering too directly in the controversy.

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ITALY

The decisions taken by the Socialist Party at its national congress will present the Christian Democrats with difficult political choices at their congress next week and possibly increase the pressures for an early parliamentary election.

The Socialists closed their congress on Sunday with a unanimous resolution stressing the party's long-range goal of creating a leftist coalition, including the Communists, that would replace the Christian Democrats as the country's dominant political force. Socialist leader De Martino emphasized, as he has in the past, that such a government would not be feasible until the Socialists have increased their strength with respect to the Communists, and until the latter have put more distance between themselves and Moscow.

The Socialists softened somewhat their long-standing demand for closer relations between a future Christian Democratic - Socialist government and the Communist opposition. The Socialists now say merely that they will not join any government "prejudicially closed to or conceived as an anti-thesis to" the Communists; they are no longer calling for a formalized relationship between the government and the Communists.

While the Socialists' new formulation offers more room for compromise with the Christian Democrats, its effect will be diminished by the tendency at the Socialist congress to portray a future coalition with the Christian Democrats as a mere stepping stone to an eventual leftist coalition.

The Socialists have compounded the Christian Democrats' troubles by ruling out another coalition with them before the next election. The Socialist decision means that the Christian Democrats will go into the next election bearing the major responsibility for government and subject to criticism from all sides. That prospect is likely to lead many Christian Democrats to argue at their congress next week that the party would fare better in an election held this summer or fall than in one held after more than a year at the head of another weak and ineffective government.

ZAIRE

Having established the basis for a political accommodation with the Popular Movement regime in Angola late last month, President Mobutu is now trying to improve relations with Moscow and Havana.

Mobutu's intentions were conveyed by Foreign Minister Nguza to the Soviet, Cuban, and East European ambassadors late last week. Nguza told the ambassadors that Zaire would welcome better relations but would expect a withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola.

Nguza later remarked to Ambassador Cutler that President Mobutu was not encouraged by the meeting and that he expects Cuban forces to assist liberation groups in Rhodesia and Namibia. Nguza pointed out that President Mobutu cannot argue against nationalist movements in southern Africa.

Mobutu is feeling particularly vulnerable just now. The heavy role played by Havana and Moscow in Angola has served to remind him that both countries contributed to the instability in Zaire in the early days of its independence and worked to keep him from assuming power. Cubans, in particular, have vowed revenge against him because of his role in the death of Patrice Lumumba.

Zaire is in the grip of a serious economic slump. Its army has been demoralized by the poor showing it made in Angola. Mobutu has managed to obtain Western support to help his country out of its economic slump but has been less successful in strengthening his military forces.

NOTES

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The Italian EC delegation in Brussels has informed Rome that the EC at a meeting this Friday will consider sending a note to Washington protesting recommended US protectionist measures on shoe imports.

The Italians, who would be most affected by the proposal, are willing to approve an EC protest note as an initial step--if it is followed by some further expression of Community disapproval.

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